

Graffiti Inside an Art and Design Library? The Hong Kong Design Institute Library Experience

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Introduction

Opened in September 2010, the Library (Learning Resource Centre) of the Hong Kong Design Institute (HKDI) is a multimedia learning facility that provides an environment conducive to study, research and leisure reading, etc. Its mission is to support and promote the academic goals of the Institute, i.e., to prepare the students for their professional careers in visual arts and design, with emphasis on learning under a creative and interactive environment; meanwhile upholding a positively relaxing, and yet inviting atmosphere.

In the following interview, Mr. Wilson Chu, (Head Librarian at the HKDI), shares with us his unique approach in managing the LRC. In addition, he also discusses the distinctive differences between the information needs and other usage preferences of the end-users at the HKDI and those of other traditional academic libraries.

Patrick Lo (PL): Could we begin this interview by first introducing yourself, e.g., your training and educational background, and your major roles and duties at the Learning Resources Centre (Library), Hong Kong Design Institute (HKDI)?

Wilson Chu (WC): I am Wilson Chu, and I am currently serving as the Head Librarian at the HKDI¹ Learning Resources Center (LRC).² The HKDI is one of the many tertiary education institutes under the Vocational Training Council (VTC)³ in Hong Kong. And I became the Head Librarian at the HKDI LRC in 2010.

With reference to my educational background, I received both my Bachelor's and Master's degrees in Computer Science from the City College of New York.⁴ Then I

¹ Hong Kong Design Institute (HKDI) – Homepage. Available at: <http://www.hkdi.edu.hk/>

² Learning Resources Centre (LRC) at the Hong Kong Design Institute (HKDI) – Homepage. Available at: http://dilwllrc.vtc.edu.hk/index_en.php

³ Vocational Training Council – Homepage. Available at: http://www.vtc.edu.hk/html/en/about/corp_info.html

⁴ The City College of New York – Homepage. Available at: <http://www.ccny.cuny.edu>

received my Master's of Library Studies (MLIS) degree in 2001 from Rutgers University⁵. In addition to that, I also earned a post-graduate diploma and a master's degree in Chinese Language and Literature from the Chinese University of Hong Kong.⁶

The formation of the HKDI was that the VTC gathered all the design departments and programmes from 3 different campuses [Shatin, Kwai Chung and Kwun Tong], and merged them together into one single unit.

PL: What was the original purpose of combining all these different programmes under VTC into one single unit? Was it meant to facilitate the overall administration and operations of the visual arts and design programmes under all the VTC branches as a whole?

WC: This 'merging' was meant to achieve better 'branding' purposes. By doing so, we would have a more 'stand-out' image, telling people that this Institute is dedicated to the teaching and learning of visual arts and design at tertiary level in Hong Kong. The HKDI Project has been operating for many years, but this physical building of the HKDI and its LRC (Library) were not officially opened until September 2010.

PL: What are the ultimate advantages for creating a strong brand or a 'stand-out' image for the HKDI? Combining programmes from 3 different campuses, has such an effort proven to be worthwhile?

WC: I am not the right person to give comment on the overall learning and teaching strategies of the HKDI. But speaking for library management, our library resources became more focused on design disciplines, as well as the facilities and library workshops. In the past year, we also offered e-resources, iMac and Adobe Creative Suite (CS)⁷ workshops that were all tailor-made for design students.

PL: What kind of academic programmes does the HKDI offer?

WC: We offer a wide range of programmes, ranging from various professional certificates to high diplomas, etc. We also started offering degree programmes since 2013. In short, the programmes we offer here at the HKDI range from 2-month certificate to 4-year degree programmes. The programmes we offer at HKDI include: advertising design, creative media, digital music and media, fashion design, fashion branding, architectural design, etc.

PL: Could you please tell me about your Library's collection size?

⁵ Rutgers University – Homepage. Available at: <https://www.rutgers.edu>

⁶ The Chinese University of Hong Kong – Homepage. Available at <http://www.cuhk.edu.hk/english/index.html>

⁷ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Adobe_Creative_Suite

WC: The HKDI Library has 80,000 items, but altogether with other VTC library branches, we have over 600,000 items. We also subscribe to 240,000 e-books and around 60,000 e-journal titles.

PL: Could you tell me about the collection highlights at the HKDI Library?

WC: The focus of our collection is visual arts and design. I would say over 60% of our book collection are related to visual arts and design. But we also have certain percentage of book titles on other academic disciplines, e.g., business administration, information technology, marketing, and merchandizing, etc. – all these are meant to support students' learning via a more interdisciplinary approach.

PL: Could you describe the user behaviour at the HKDI Library? How are they different from the other users at a regular academic library?

WC: They are very different! For one thing, they frequently make the furniture inside the Library dirty. Instead of using their own studio space, they tend to paint and draw everywhere inside the Library. In other words, you can easily find graffiti, scratches, unwanted pen/pencil markings and other damages made by paper cutters, colour paints or other sharp/art tools around the user areas inside the Library. Under the [Institute's] regulations, artworks should only be done at the studios designated for the students. However, the art studios are not open 24 hours a day. So when the studio is closed and these students suddenly feel the need to fulfill their creative urges, and wish to do a painting, without giving any serious thinking, they would just lay out the materials on the table inside the Library and start painting.

We also have this Student Learning Common located right next to the HKDI LRC, called Zone24. The Common was opened in 2010, but we had to close it down in 2011 for renovation, because the whole place was so messy – as a result of the students doing artworks inside, instead of using their own studio space. I also heard that other art and design libraries in Hong Kong also suffer from similar problems, i.e., unwanted graffiti and other damages made by students inside the library.

In addition, the overall atmosphere inside our Library is more relaxing. Compared to the users at other traditional academic libraries, our students do not follow regular study and research patterns, i.e., they prefer not to sit quietly at the desk and study. Instead, they tend to gather together as a team to engage in some kind of modeling projects (e.g., taking photographs or doing special makeups, etc.). You can easily find our students engaged in various group activity or discussions, as so-called brainstorming for creative ideas. In this sense, we are a 'noisy' Library, as we allow the students to make noise and engage in discussions in open areas.

PL: As the Head Librarian of the HKDI Library, how do you deal with this graffiti problem? Do you go around to educate the users on a regular basis, as a way to prevent it from happening? Or do you deploy security guards to go on patrol regularly, and to stop the students from doing artwork inside the Library? Or to

make students go through disciplinary measures immediately if they are found damaging the library furniture?

WC: I have designated a library staff to monitor students' behaviour closely. We have also given these students a very clear message that the Library must not be used as a space for doing graffiti, or artwork of any kind, by putting up a very large poster at the main entrance. If they are caught violating these regulations, we will suspend their circulation records, as a way to discourage them from repeating such an offense.

PL: Do you know the reason why the students chose to come to the Library instead of using their own studio space or other venue (such as a café) for their discussions and other creative activities? Do they come to the Library to find images for their own creative inspirations?

WC: The reason that we changed the name from the 'Library' to the 'Learning Resources Centre (LRC)' was because it would enable us to change the concepts, in terms of how librarians should/could manage and operate the Library. According to the old or traditional library concept, users would spend a great deal of time alone, isolating oneself inside a study carrel, and reading a book quietly in solitude.

In this new era, we encourage them to interact even more actively with others. Inside this Library, you cannot find a single study carrel. We do not even have any designated discussion zone. As I mentioned earlier, students are allowed to make noise and engage in discussions anywhere inside the Library. In other words, the whole Library is a discussion zone itself. In addition, we do not want the students to come to the Library to just borrow books or to study for tests, we also encourage them to use our Library as a space for socializing – to chit chat with friends, or even to lie flat on the sofas to relax in between their lessons.

PL: I wonder if you also provide information literacy workshops for your students, as a way to teach them how to be self-dependent in terms of locating materials inside the Library?

WC: I found that information literacy workshops are not very popular amongst our young students at HKDI. The reason is that our students are not at the same research level as the other students at the Universities, e.g., the University of Hong Kong⁸ or the Chinese University of Hong Kong.⁹ For this reason, we almost never receive any formal reference enquiries. The academic level amongst our students at HKDI is somewhat in between high schools and universities. Having said that, we do organize a number of workshops on teaching the students how to use mobile devices, e.g., iPhone and iPad to access library resources from remote sites. This I would say is our way as librarians to respond to the new trend in learning in the digital era, i.e., exploring various new ways to enhance

⁸ The University of Hong Kong – Homepage. Available at: <http://www.hku.hk/>

⁹ The Chinese University of Hong Kong – Homepage. Available at: <http://www.cuhk.edu.hk/english/index.html>

teaching and learning outside the physical classroom environment. In addition, we do not organize workshops for only students, instead we welcome both students and HKDI staff at all levels to take part in our library workshops.

Another reason why our circulation statistics are much higher than the other VTC branch libraries is that our design students really need to look at these design books that are full of colourful images as a way to gather ideas for their own designs. And based on feedback gathered from the students, images found on the Internet cannot replace the printed images found on these design books – simply because the visual quality of the images found in printed books is far more superior.

PL: Could you describe in details the circulation statistics at the HKDI Library? Via looking at the circulation statistics, have you identified any interesting usage patterns amongst your users, e.g., what kind of books or resources tend to be more popular amongst the students here?

WC: HKDI LRC opened in 2010, and [according to statistics we have logged, the circulation checkout rates have been steadily increasing for the past three academic years. And the 4th year is also looking strong on the circulation figures. We never studied what kind of materials were the most popular among our students, but our acquisitions policy focuses more on design reference and textbooks over leisure books (e.g., novels) and blockbuster movies.

PL: As the HKDI Librarian, which part(s) of your job do you find most satisfying?

WC: As the HKDI Librarian, under the current digital era, everything is so easily available via the Internet with a few keystrokes – despite that, the HKDI Library could still witness a positive and yet steady growth of circulation usage of our printed books over the past few years – this is definitely something that I found most gratifying.

In addition, my Department [LRC] is collaborating with three different service units, i.e., the Library, the IT Department and the ETU (Education Technology Unit, including AV and printing services). I have to synthesize the end-user services amongst these three different operational units, [and getting them] to work together as a team is definitely not easy. But if everything works out at the end; and our young users are telling us that they enjoy spending time in our Library and appreciate what we could do for them – I have no more complaints. At the end of the day, it is our satisfied and loyal users that make my hard work worthwhile.

To conclude this interview, I would like to highlight that I really like the way VTC is running the Library. The overall atmosphere of this Library is very leisurely, inviting, and at the same time, very lively and engaging. At the HKDI Library, I am very fortunate that I have been given a lot of freedom to exercise my professional knowledge and skills to the best advantage for the overall success of the whole organization.

Appendix I

Hong Kong Design Institute Learning Resource Centre – Basic Facts (date as of January, 2014)	
Size of printed collection	77,743 volumes
Size of electronic collection	E-books: 2,16,752 titles Electronic databases: 120
No. of PC stations	237 (Mac: 53%)
No. of seats for users	Around 480
Physical size of library (square meters)	2,861
Café / Coffee bar / Vending machines	Vending machines are available at Zone24 (Learning Common)
Group discussion rooms	4
Art gallery, display, & exhibition space	1, still under planning
Reading room	NIL
Information commons	Yes
Archive / Special collections	NIL
Media production rooms	Yes
Lounges	NIL
New book displays	Yes
Leisure / popular reading collection	A few
Faculty reading rooms	NIL

Appendix II

Images of the HKDI Library and Its Users





